MANIFESTO OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

VLADIMIR LENIN

1870 - 1924

LEON TROTSKY

1879 - 1940

In 1938, the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky stated that "the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership." These words are as true and relevant today as the day when they were written.

In the third decade of the 21st century, the capitalist system finds itself in an existential crisis. Such situations are by no means unusual in history. They are the expression of the fact that a given socio-historical system has reached its limits and is no longer capable of playing any progressive role.

The Marxist theory of historical materialism provides us with a scientific explanation for this phenomenon. Every socio-economic system arises for certain reasons. It develops, flourishes, then reaches its peak, at which point it enters into a phase of decline. This was the case with slave society and the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

In its day, capitalism succeeded in developing industry, agriculture, science, and technique to a level undreamed of in the past. In so doing, it was unconsciously laying the material foundations for a future classless society.

But now this has reached its limits, and everything is turning into its opposite. The capitalist system long ago exhausted its historic potential. Unable to carry society further, it has now reached the point of no return.

The present crisis is not a normal cyclical crisis of capitalism. It is an existential crisis, expressed not only in the stagnation of the productive forces, but also in a general crisis of culture, morality, politics and religion.

The yawning abyss that separates rich and poor – between obscene wealth in the hands of a few parasites, and poverty, destitution and despair for the great majority of the human race – has never been greater.

These are revolting symptoms of the sickness of a society that is rotten ripe for overthrow. Its eventual downfall is inevitable and cannot be avoided. But that does not mean that the bourgeoisie lacks the means of delaying crises or of reducing their impact, at least to some extent and for a temporary period.

Yet such measures merely create new and insoluble contradictions. The 2008 financial crisis was a major turning point. The truth is that world capitalism has never recovered from that crisis.

For decades, bourgeois economists argued that the 'invisible hand of the market' would solve everything and the government should play no role whatsoever in the economic life of the nation. But the markets collapsed and were only saved by massive government intervention. During that crisis, governments and central banks were compelled to pour vast sums of money into the system to prevent a total catastrophe.

The bourgeoisie succeeded in saving the system only by pushing it far beyond its natural limits. Governments spent vast quantities of money that they did not possess. This reckless method was repeated in the COVID-19 pandemic.

These desperate measures led inevitably to an uncontrolled explosion of inflation and the creation of huge public, corporate and private debt, which has forced governments to slam on the brakes. Now the whole process must go into reverse.

The age of exceptionally low rates of interest and easy credit is now merely a dim memory of the past. There is no possibility that we will return to the previous period any time soon – if ever.

The global economy is faced with the prospect of a perfect storm in which one factor feeds upon another to produce a sharp downward spiral.

The world is heading towards an uncertain future characterised by a never-ending cycle of wars, economic collapse and increasing misery. Even in the wealthiest nations, wages are undermined by the remorseless rise in prices, while deep cuts in public spending constantly erode social services such as healthcare and education.

These measures represent a direct assault on the living standards of the workers and the middle class. But they only serve to deepen the crisis. All the

attempts of the bourgeoisie to restore the economic equilibrium only serve to destroy the social and political equilibrium. The bourgeoisie finds itself trapped in a crisis for which it has no solution. That is the key to understanding the present situation.

Lenin explained long ago, however, that there is no such thing as a final crisis of capitalism. Unless it is overthrown, the capitalist system will always recover from even the deepest crisis, albeit at a terrible cost for humanity.

The limits of globalisation

The main causes of capitalist crises are, on the one hand, private ownership of the means of production and, on the other, the suffocating straitjacket of the national market, which is far too narrow to contain the productive forces that capitalism has created.

For a time, the phenomenon known as 'globalisation' enabled the bourgeoisie to partially overcome the limitation of the national market through the boosting of world trade and an intensification of the international division of labour.

This was further accelerated by the incorporation of China, India, and Russia into the capitalist world market, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was the main means by which the capitalist system survived and grew in the past few decades.

Just as the old alchemists believed they had discovered the secret method for transmuting base metal into gold, so the bourgeois economists believed that they had discovered the secret cure for all the problems of capitalism.

Now these illusions have burst like soap bubbles in the air. It is quite clear that this process has reached its limits and is going into reverse. Economic nationalism and protectionist measures are now the dominant tendencies – precisely the same trends that turned the recession of the 1930s into the Great Depression.

This marks a decisive change in the whole situation. It has inevitably led to an enormous exacerbation of the contradictions between nations and the proliferation of military conflict and protectionism.

It is very clearly expressed by the noisy campaign being waged by US imperialism under the banner of 'America First!' – meaning that the rest of the world must be pushed into second, third, or fourth position, leading to further contradictions, wars, and trade wars.

Horror without end

The crisis finds its expression in instability in every sphere: economic, financial, social, political, diplomatic, and military. In the poor countries, millions are faced with a slow death by starvation, squeezed by the remorseless grip of the imperialist moneylenders.

The UN estimated in June 2023 that the number of people forcibly displaced by war, famine, and the impact of climate change, stood at 110 million – a sharp increase on pre-pandemic levels. This was before the war on Gaza.

In a desperate attempt to escape from these horrors, large numbers of people are forced to flee to countries like the USA and Europe. Those who make the difficult and dangerous journeys to cross the Mediterranean or the Rio Grande endure unspeakable violence and abuses on the way. Tens of thousands die every year in the attempt.

These are the terrible consequences of the economic and social collapse caused by the ravages of the so-called free market economy, and the violent actions of imperialism, which cause devastation, death, and destruction on an unimaginable scale.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the USA became for a time the only superpower in the world. With colossal power came colossal arrogance. US imperialism imposed its will everywhere, using a combination of economic power and military muscle to subdue any nation that refused to bend the knee to Washington.

Having seized control of the Balkans and other former Soviet spheres of influence, it launched a vicious and unprovoked invasion of Iraq that caused the deaths of over a million people. The invasion of Afghanistan was yet another bloody episode. Nobody knows how many lives were lost in that unhappy land.

But the limits of US power were exposed in Syria, where the Americans suffered a defeat as a result of the intervention by Russia and Iran. This marked an abrupt change in the situation. From that time onwards, US imperialism has suffered one humiliating setback after another.

This fact in itself is a striking proof of the crisis of capitalism on a world scale. In the 19th century, British imperialism derived enormous wealth from its role as the dominant world power. But now things have changed into their opposite.

The crisis of capitalism and growing tensions between nations are making the world a much more turbulent and dangerous place. Being the world's main policeman is an increasingly complex and expensive job, with trouble flaring up everywhere and former allies, sensing weakness, ganging up to defy the top boss.

US imperialism is the most powerful and reactionary force on the planet. Its military spending equals that of the next ten top countries combined. And yet, it is unable to decisively impose its will in any region of the world.

The cold cruelty of US imperialism, and also its repulsive hypocrisy, was clearly exposed by the horrific events in Gaza. It was an active participant in the atrocious massacre perpetrated on helpless men, women, and children by the monstrous Israeli regime.

This criminal war of aggression could not have lasted a single day without the active support of the US ruling clique. Yet, while hypocritically wailing about the fate of these victims, Washington continued to send arms and money to assist Netanyahu in his butcher's work.

But most striking has been the total inability of Washington to compel the Israelis to do what suits American interests. However hard they pulled the strings, the marionette continued to dance to his own tune. This was a very instructive indication of the decline of American power, and not only in the Middle East.

The ability of one nation to dominate others is not absolute, but relative. The situation is not static, but dynamic and changes all the time. History shows that formerly backward and oppressed nations can become transformed into aggressive states that turn on their neighbours and attempt to dominate and exploit them.

Today, Turkey is one of the dominant powers in the Middle East. It is a regional imperialist power. By contrast, Russia and China, having entered the capitalist road, have revealed themselves as formidable imperialist powers with a global reach. This brings them into direct conflict with American imperialism.

China and Russia have not yet acquired the same level of economic and military power as the USA, but they have emerged as powerful rivals, challenging Washington in a global struggle for markets, spheres of influence, raw materials and profitable investments. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have provided graphic proof of the limits of the power of US imperialism.

In the past, the existing tensions would already have led to a major war between the Great Powers. But changing conditions have removed this from the agenda – at least for the present.

The capitalists do not wage war for patriotism, democracy, or any other high-sounding principle. They wage war for profit, to capture foreign markets, sources of raw material (such as oil), and to expand spheres of influence.

Is that not absolutely clear? And is it also not very clear that a nuclear war would signify none of these things, but only the mutual destruction of both sides? They have even coined a phrase to describe this scenario: MAD (mutually assured destruction).

Another decisive factor weighing against open warfare between the main imperialist powers is the mass opposition to war, particularly (but not exclusively) in the USA. A recent poll indicates that only 5 percent of the US population would favour direct military intervention in Ukraine.

This is hardly surprising, given the humiliating defeats suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan, a fact that is burned into the consciousness of the people of the United States. This, plus the fear that a direct military confrontation with Russia could escalate, creating the risk of nuclear war, acts as a serious restraint.

Although a world war is ruled out under present conditions, there will be many 'small' wars and proxy wars like the one in Ukraine. The global impact of such wars will be significant. This will add to the general volatility and fuel the flames of world disorder. This was made very clear by the events in Gaza.

The future that this system offers can only be one of endless misery, suffering, disease, and wars for the human race. In the words of Lenin: capitalism is horror without end.

Crisis of bourgeois democracy

The economic conditions in the coming period will be far more similar to those of the 1930s than those that followed the Second World War. The question therefore arises: will bourgeois democracy remain intact for the foreseeable future?

Democracy is, in fact, the monopoly of a few wealthy and privileged nations, where the class war can be kept within acceptable limits by giving concessions to the working class.

This was the material premise upon which so-called democracy in countries like the United States and Britain could be maintained for decades. Republicans and Democrats, Tories and Labour, alternated in power, without making any fundamental difference.

In reality, bourgeois democracy is merely a smiling mask – a façade behind which lies the reality of the dictatorship of the banks and big corporations. To the degree that the ruling class is unable to continue to grant concessions to the masses, the smiling mask is cast to one side, to reveal the ugly reality of rule by violence and coercion. This is becoming increasingly evident.

The free market was said to be a guarantor of democracy. But democracy and capitalism are opposites. The strategists of Capital are now openly expressing doubts about the viability of bourgeois democracy and the very future of capitalism itself.

The old, comforting myth that every citizen has equal opportunity has now been shattered by the stark contrast of obscene wealth and luxury being shamelessly flaunted before a mass of poverty, unemployment, homelessness and despair, even in wealthy nations.

The deepening economic decline now affects not only the working class but also a significant layer of the middle class. Economic shocks, the cost-of-living crisis, soaring inflation, and ever-rising interest rates spell bankruptcy for small businesses. There is general insecurity and fear for the future at all levels of society with the exception of the super-rich and their hangers-on.

The legitimacy of the system was supposed to be based on widely shared prosperity. But capital is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few billionaires, giant banks, and corporations.

Instead of democracy, we have the rule of a barely disguised plutocracy. Wealth buys power. Everybody knows this. Democracy means one citizen, one vote. But capitalism means one dollar, one vote. A few billion dollars buys an entrance ticket to the White House.

This fact is becoming increasingly obvious to most people. There is growing indifference to the existing political order, and distrust – indeed hatred – of the ruling elite and its institutions.

Parliamentary rule itself is undermined. Elected bodies turn into mere talking shops, while the real power passes from Parliament to the Cabinet, from the Cabinet to cliques of unelected officials and 'advisers'.

The brazen lie that the police and judiciary are somehow independent is being laid bare for all to see. As the class struggle intensifies, these institutions will be increasingly exposed and lose whatever respect and authority they may once have possessed.

In the end, the bourgeoisie will draw the conclusion that there is too much disorder, too many strikes and demonstrations, too much chaos. "We demand order!" Already we see limitations being placed on democratic rights, such as the right to demonstrate, the right to strike, the freedom of speech and the press.

At a given stage, the bourgeoisie will be tempted to resort to open dictatorship in one form or another. But this could only become a realistic prospect after the working class had suffered a series of severe defeats, as was the case in Germany following the First World War.

But long before that, the working class will have many opportunities to test its strength against that of the bourgeois state and move to take power into its own hands.

Is there a risk of fascism?

Superficial impressionists on the so-called Left internationally foolishly see Trumpism as fascism. Such confusion cannot help us to understand the real significance of important phenomena.

This nonsense leads them directly into the swamp of class-collaborationist policies. By advancing the false idea of 'the lesser evil', they invite the working class and its organisations to unite with one reactionary wing of the bourgeois against another.

It was this false policy that allowed them to push voters to support Joe Biden and the Democrats – a vote that many people subsequently bitterly regretted.

By constantly harping on about the alleged danger of 'fascism', they will disarm the working class when faced with genuine fascist formations in the future. As for the present, they miss the point entirely.

There are plenty of right-wing demagogues around, and some even get elected into power. However, that is not the same as a fascist regime, which is based on the mass mobilisation of the enraged petty bourgeois as a battering ram to destroy the workers' organisations.

In the 1930s, the contradictions in society were resolved in a relatively short space of time, and could end only in either the victory of the proletarian revolution, or in reaction in the form of fascism or Bonapartism.

But the ruling class burned its fingers badly when it threw its weight behind the fascists in the past. It will not go down that road easily.

More importantly, today, such a rapid solution is ruled out by the changed balance of forces. The social reserves of reaction are far weaker than in the 1930s, and the specific weight of the working class is far greater.

The peasantry has largely disappeared in the advanced capitalist countries, while wide layers that formerly saw themselves as middle-class (professional people, white-collar workers, teachers, university professors, civil servants, doctors and nurses) have drawn closer to the proletariat and become unionised.

The students, who in the 1920s and 1930s provided the shock troops for fascism, have swung sharply to the left and are open to revolutionary ideas. The working class, in most countries, has not suffered serious defeats for decades. Its forces are largely intact.

The bourgeoisie finds itself faced with the most serious crisis in its history, but because of the enormous strengthening of the working class, it is unable to quickly move in the direction of open reaction.

That means that the ruling class will face serious difficulties when they try to take back the gains of the past. The depth of the crisis means that they will have to try to cut and cut to the bone. But that will provoke explosions in one country after another.

The environmental disaster

In addition to the constant wars and economic crises, humanity is threatened by the rape of the planet. In its constant search for profit, the capitalist system has poisoned the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink.

It is destroying the Amazon rainforest and the polar ice caps. The oceans are choked with plastic and polluted with chemical waste. Animal species are being rendered extinct at an alarming rate. And the future of entire nations is at risk.

The poorest sections of society and the working class are the worst hit by the impact of pollution and climate change. On top of this, the ruling class is asking them to foot the bill for the crisis that capitalism has created.

Marx explained that the choice before humanity was socialism or barbarism. The elements of barbarism already exist even in the most advanced capitalist countries, and threaten the very existence of civilisation. But now we are entitled to say that capitalism poses a threat to the very existence of the human race.

All these things stir the conscience of millions, especially young people. But moral indignation and angry demonstrations are totally insufficient. If the environmental movement confines itself to the politics of empty gestures, it will condemn itself to impotence.

The environmentalists are capable of pointing to the most obvious symptoms of the problem. But they do not give a correct diagnosis, and without that, it is impossible to offer a cure. The environmental movement can only succeed in its objectives if it takes up a clear and unambiguous anti-capitalist revolutionary position.

We must endeavour to reach the best elements and convince them that the problem is capitalism itself. The environmental catastrophe is the result of the madness of the market economy and the profit motive.

The so-called free market economy is impotent to solve any of the problems facing humanity. It is colossally wasteful, destructive and inhuman. No progress can be made on this basis. The case for a planned economy is unanswerable.

It is necessary to expropriate the bankers and capitalists and replace the anarchy of the market with a harmonious and rational system of planning.

The capitalist system now displays all the horrible features of a creature that has lost all reason to exist. But that does not mean that it recognises that it is facing extinction. Quite the contrary, in fact.

This degenerate and diseased system resembles a sick and senile old man who clings tenaciously to life. It will continue to stagger on until it is overthrown by the conscious revolutionary movement of the working class.

It is the task of the working class to put an end to this lengthy process of the death agony of capitalism through its revolutionary overthrow and the reconstruction of society from top to bottom.

The existence of capitalism now represents a clear and present threat to the future of the planet Earth. In order that humanity may live, the capitalist system must die.

The subjective factor

From the general crisis of capitalism, it is possible to conclude that its eventual collapse is inevitable and cannot be avoided. In the same sense, the victory of socialism is an historical inevitability.

That is true *in a general sense*. But from general propositions it is impossible to have a concrete explanation of actual events.

If the whole thing is completely inevitable, there is no need for a revolutionary party, for trade unions, strikes, demonstrations, the study of theory, or anything else. But all history proves precisely the opposite. The subjective factor, the leadership, plays an absolutely fundamental role at decisive moments in history.

Karl Marx pointed out that the working class without organisation is nothing more than raw material for exploitation. Without organisation we are nothing. With it, we are everything.

But here we arrive at the nub of the problem. The real issue is the complete absence of leadership – the complete rottenness of the leaders of the workers.

The historically evolved mass organisations of the working class have been subjected to the pressure of the ruling class and the petty bourgeoisie over the course of decades of relative prosperity. This strengthened the grip of the labour bureaucracy on these organisations.

The crisis of capitalism necessarily means the crisis of reformism. The right-wing leaders have abandoned the ideas upon which the movement was founded and have become divorced from the class they are supposed to represent.

More than at any other period in history, the leadership of the workers' organisations has come under the pressure of the bourgeoisie. To use an expression coined by the American pioneer socialist Daniel DeLeon and often quoted by Lenin, they are merely the "labour lieutenants of capital". They represent the past, not the present or the future. They will be swept aside in the stormy period that now opens up.

But the problem does not start and end with the right-wing reformists.

The bankruptcy of the 'Left'

A particularly pernicious role has been played by the so-called Left, who have everywhere capitulated to the pressures of the right wing and the establishment. We saw this with Tsipras and the other leaders of Syriza in Greece. The same process can be seen with Podemos in Spain, in the USA with Bernie Sanders, and in Britain with Jeremy Corbyn.

In all these cases, the left leaders initially aroused the hopes of many people, but these hopes were dashed when they capitulated to the pressures of the right wing.

It would be easy to accuse these leaders of cowardice and weakness. But here we are not dealing with individual morality or personal courage, but rather with extreme political weakness.

The essential problem of the left reformists is that they believe that it is possible to achieve the demands of the masses without breaking with the capitalist system itself. In this respect, they do not differ from the right-wing reformists, except that the latter do not even bother to conceal their complete capitulation to the bankers and capitalists.

In the main, today the 'Lefts' do not even talk about socialism any more. They are not even a shadow of the old left leaders in the 1930s. Instead, they confine themselves to feeble requests for better living standards, more democratic rights, etcetera.

They do not even refer to capitalism any more, but rather to 'neoliberalism' – that is to say, 'bad' capitalism, as opposed to 'nice' capitalism – although they never say exactly what this imaginary nice capitalism is supposed to be.

Because they refuse to break with the system, the left reformists inevitably see the need to find accommodation with the ruling class. They try to prove that they are no threat and that they can be trusted to govern in the interest of the capitalists.

This explains their obstinate refusal to break with the right wing – the open agents of the ruling class inside the labour movement – which they try to justify on the grounds of the need to maintain unity.

In the end, this always leads them to capitulate to the right. But when the latter gains control, they do not display the same timidity, but immediately launch a vicious witch hunt against the left.

Thus, cowardice here is not a question of the personal character of this or that individual. It is an inseparable part of the political DNA of left reformism.

The struggle against oppression

The crisis of capitalism has found its expression in many deep-seated currents of opposition to the existing society, its values, its morality, and its intolerable injustices and oppression.

The central contradiction in society remains the antagonism between wage labour and capital. However, oppression takes many different forms, some of them considerably older and more deep-rooted than wage slavery.

Among the most universal and painful forms of oppression is that of women in a male-dominated world. The crisis is increasing the economic dependence of women. Cuts in state social expenditure are disproportionately burdening women with the weight of childcare and care for the elderly.

There is an epidemic of violence against women across the world. And rights such as access to abortion are under attack. This is provoking a huge backlash, and a militant mood is growing, especially among young women.

The rebellion of women against this monstrous oppression is of fundamental importance in the struggle against capitalism. Without full participation of women there can be no successful socialist revolution.

The struggle against all forms of oppression and discrimination is a necessary part of the fight against capitalism.

Our position is very simple: in every struggle, we will always take the side of the oppressed against the oppressors. But this general statement is insufficient in itself to define our position. We must add that our attitude is essentially a negative one.

That is to say: we are opposed to oppression and discrimination of any sort, whether it be directed against women, people of colour, gay people, transgender people, or any other oppressed group or minority.

We utterly reject identity politics, however, which, under the guise of defending the rights of a particular group, plays a reactionary and divisive role that ultimately weakens the unity of the working class and provides invaluable assistance to the ruling class.

The labour movement has become infected with all kinds of alien ideas: postmodernism, identity politics, 'political correctness', and all the other bizarre nonsense that has been smuggled in from the universities by the 'left' petty bourgeoisie, which acts as a transmission belt for alien and reactionary ideology.

A by-product of so-called postmodernism, identity politics has served to addle the brains of students. These alien ideas have been introduced into the labour movement, where they act as a most effective weapon in the hands of the bureaucracy for its struggle against the most militant class fighters.

Lenin laid stress on the need for communists to fight on all fronts – not just the economic and political front, but also the ideological front. We stand firmly on the solid foundation of Marxist theory and the philosophy of dialectical materialism.

This stands in complete contradiction with philosophical idealism in all its forms: whether the open, undisguised mysticism of religion, or the cynical, disguised, and no-less-poisonous mysticism of postmodernism.

The struggle against this alien class ideology and its petty-bourgeois advocates therefore constitutes a very important task. No concessions must be

made to divisive and counterrevolutionary ideas, which play into the hands of the bosses and their age-old tactic: divide and rule.

In fact, a healthy reaction against these pernicious ideas has already begun amongst a layer of youth moving towards communism.

Communists stand firmly on the ground of class politics and defend the unity of the working class above all divisions of race, colour, gender, language, or religion. We do not care if you are black or white, male or female. Nor are we remotely interested in your lifestyle or who your partner is, or is not. These are purely personal matters and no concern of anyone – bureaucrats, priests, or politicians.

The only requirement for joining us is that you are prepared and willing to fight for the only cause that can offer genuine freedom, equality, and genuinely human relations between men and women: the sacred cause of the fight to emancipate the working class.

But the prior condition for joining the communists is that you leave all the reactionary nonsense of identity politics outside the door.

The trade unions

The present period is the most stormy and convulsive in history. The stage is set for a general revival of the class struggle. But it will not be easy. The working class is beginning to awaken after a more-or-less dormant period. It will have to relearn many lessons, even such elementary lessons as the need to organise in trade unions.

But the leadership of the mass organisations, beginning with the unions, are everywhere in a lamentable state. They have revealed themselves to be completely inadequate to meet the most pressing needs of the working class. They have not even been able to build and strengthen the unions themselves.

As a result, whole layers of the new generation of young workers engaged in precarious jobs as delivery-drivers, call centre workers, and the like, find themselves as little more than raw material for exploitation.

Working in appalling conditions in modern sweatshops like Amazon warehouses, they are subjected to brutal exploitation, long hours and bad pay. The days when workers could get serious wage increases by merely threatening strike action are long gone. The bosses will say they cannot afford even to maintain the present level of wages, let alone give concessions.

Those who still dream of class peace and consensus are living in the past, in a phase of capitalism that has ceased to exist. It is the union leaders, not the Marxists, who are utopians! A panorama opens up of great battles but also of defeats of the proletariat as a result of bad leadership. What is required is a full-blooded militancy and a revival of the class struggle.

The process of radicalisation will continue and deepen. This will open up big possibilities for the work of communists in the trade unions and workplaces.

The way forward demands a serious struggle against reformism; a struggle to regenerate the mass organisations of the working class, beginning with the unions. They must be transformed into fighting organisations of the working class.

But this can only be achieved by an implacable struggle against the reformist bureaucracy. The unions must be purged from top to bottom, and the policies of class collaboration completely eliminated.

Militancy is not enough

The struggle against reformism does not mean that we are opposed to reforms. We do not criticise the union leaders because they fight for reforms, but on the contrary – because they do not fight at all.

They seek accommodation with the bosses, avoid taking militant action, and when they are forced into it by the pressure of the rank-and-file, they do

everything in their power to limit strike action and reach a rotten compromise in order to end the movement as soon as possible.

Communists will fight for even the smallest reforms that represent an improvement to the workers' living standards and rights. But under present conditions, the struggle for meaningful reforms can only succeed to the degree that it acquires the widest and most revolutionary scope.

The limitations of formal bourgeois democracy will be exposed to the extent that it is tested in practice. We will fight to defend any meaningful democratic demands, in order to bring about the most favourable conditions for the fullest development of the class struggle.

The working class as a whole can only learn through its own experience. Without the day-to-day fight for advance under capitalism, the socialist revolution would be unthinkable.

But in the last analysis, trade union militancy is not enough. Under conditions of capitalist crisis even the gains the working class makes cannot be long lasting.

What the bosses concede with the right hand they will take back with the left. Wage increases are cancelled out by inflation or tax increases. Factories are closed and unemployment increases.

The only way to ensure that reforms are not cancelled out is by fighting for a radical change in society. At a certain point, defensive struggles can become transformed into offensive ones. It is precisely through the experience of small struggles for partial demands that the ground is prepared for the final battle for power.

The need for the party

The working class is the only genuinely revolutionary class in society. It alone has no reason to desire the continuation of a system based on private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of human labour power to satisfy the rapacious greed of a few wealthy parasites.

It is the duty of the communists to make conscious the unconscious or semi-conscious striving of the working class to change society. Only the working class has the necessary power to overthrow the dictatorship of the bankers and capitalists.

Let us never forget that not a lightbulb shines, not a wheel turns and not a telephone rings without the kind permission of the working class.

That is a colossal power. And yet it is a power in potential only. In order for that potential power to become a reality, something else is necessary. That something is organisation.

There is a precise analogy with the power of nature. Steam is just such a power. It provided the motor force for the industrial revolution. It is the power that drives engines, providing light, heating and energy to bring life and movement to great cities.

But steam only becomes a power when it is concentrated in a mechanism called a piston box. Without such a mechanism, it is merely dissipated uselessly into the atmosphere. It remains a mere potential, and nothing more.

Even at the most elementary level, every class-conscious worker understands the need for trade union organisation. But the highest expression of proletarian organisation is the revolutionary party that unites the most conscious, dedicated and combative layer of the class in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. The creation of such a party is the most urgent task facing us.

Consciousness

The growing economic and social instability threatens to undermine the foundations of the existing order. How can one explain the violent swings in elections everywhere, to the right and to the left and back to the right?

The myopic left reformists blame the workers for their alleged backwardness. That is the way they try to excuse themselves and cover up their own per-

nicious role. But what this reflects is desperation and a complete lack of a serious alternative. The masses are desperately trying to find a way out. And they are testing one option after another. One government, party and leader after another is put to the test and found wanting and discarded.

In this process, the reformists play a most lamentable role, and the left reformists an even more lamentable one, if that is possible. Arising out of this, we see a change in consciousness. It is not the kind of slow, gradual change one might expect.

It takes time to mature, naturally, but changes of quantity eventually reach a critical point where quantity suddenly becomes quality. Sharp changes in consciousness are inherent in the whole situation.

This is precisely the kind of change that we are now seeing, particularly in the youth. A survey asked over 1,000 British adults to rank the words and phrases they associate most with "capitalism".

The top results were "greed" (73 percent), "constant pressure to achieve" (70 percent) and "corruption" (69 percent). 42 percent of respondents agreed with the phrase "capitalism is dominated by the rich, they set the political agenda."

The change is most clearly expressed in the trend towards communist ideas among the youth. These young people call themselves communists, although many have never read the *Communist Manifesto* and have no knowledge of scientific socialism.

But the betrayals of the Left have made the very word 'socialism' stink in their nostrils. It does not resonate any more with the best people. They say: "We want communism. Only that and nothing less than that."

What is a communist?

In the section of the *Communist Manifesto* entitled *Proletarians and Communists,* we read the following:

"In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?

"Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties.

"They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

"They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

"The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. [...]

"The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."

These lines express the essence of the matter very well.

Is the time right for a Revolutionary Communist International?

The growing backlash against the so-called free market economy has terrified the apologists of capitalism. They are looking with dread towards an uncertain and turbulent future.

Together with this pervading mood of pessimism, the more thoughtful representatives of the bourgeoisie are beginning to discover uncomfortable parallels with the world of 1917. It is in this context, that the need for a revolutionary party with a clean banner and clear revolutionary policies is posed.

The international character of our movement derives from the fact that capitalism is a world system. From the very beginning, Marx strove to create an *international* organisation of the working class.

However, since the Stalinist degeneration of the Communist International, no such organisation has existed. Now is the time to launch a Revolutionary Communist International!

This will be seen by some as sectarianism. But it is nothing of the sort. We have absolutely nothing in common with the ultra-left and sectarian grouplets who strut around like ridiculous peacocks on the fringes of the labour movement.

We must turn our back on the sectarians and face towards the new fresh layers who are moving towards communism. The need for such a step is neither an expression of impatience nor of subjective voluntarism. It is rooted in a clear understanding of the objective situation. It is this, and nothing else, that renders such a step absolutely necessary and unavoidable.

Let us examine the facts:

The latest polls from Britain, the USA, Australia and other countries provide us with a very clear indication that the idea of communism is spreading rapidly. The potential for communism is enormous. Our task is to make this potential a reality by giving it an organisational expression.

By organising the vanguard in a genuine Revolutionary Communist Party, by fusing it with a disciplined Bolshevik organisation, educating it in Marxist ideas, and training it in Lenin's methods, we will build a force that can play a key role in the development of the socialist revolution in the coming period.

That is our task. We must overcome all obstacles in order to achieve it.

Stalinism versus Bolshevism

For a long time, the enemies of communism believed that they had successfully exorcised the ghosts of the October Revolution. The collapse of the So-

viet Union seemed to confirm their belief that communism was dead and buried. "The Cold War is over," they gloated, "and we won."

Contrary to the legend so persistently repeated by our class enemies, however, it was not communism that collapsed in the 1980s, but Stalinism – a horrible, bureaucratic and totalitarian caricature that bore no relation to the regime of workers' democracy established by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917.

Stalin carried out a political counterrevolution against Bolshevism, basing himself on a privileged caste of officials that rose to power in a period of the ebb of the revolution following Lenin's death. In order to consolidate his counterrevolutionary dictatorship, Stalin was obliged to murder all of Lenin's comrades and a huge number of other genuine communists.

Stalinism and Bolshevism, far from being identical, are not only different in kind: they are mutually exclusive and mortal enemies, separated by a river of blood.

Degeneration of the 'Communist' Parties

Communism is indelibly associated with the name of Lenin and the glorious traditions of the Russian Revolution, but the Communist Parties of today are 'communist' in name only. The leaders of those parties long ago abandoned the ideas of Lenin and Bolshevism.

A decisive break with Leninism was the acceptance of the anti-Marxist policy of socialism in one country. In 1928, Trotsky predicted that this would inevitably lead to the national-reformist degeneration of every Communist Party in the world. This prediction proved to be correct.

At first, the leaders of the Communist Parties obediently carried out the dictates of Stalin and the bureaucracy, slavishly following every twist and turn that came from Moscow. They later repudiated Stalin, but instead of returning to Lenin, they made a sharp turn to the right. In breaking from Moscow, in most countries these parties adopted reformist perspectives and policies.

Following the fatal logic of 'socialism in one country', the leadership of every national party adapted themselves to the interests of the bourgeoisie of their own country. This has led to the complete degeneration, and even the total liquidation of the Communist Parties.

The most extreme case was the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which used to be the biggest and most-powerful in Europe. The policies of national-reformist degeneration led in the end to the dissolution of the PCI and its transformation into a bourgeois reformist party.

The British Communist Party nowadays only has influence through a daily paper, the Morning Star, the line of which does not go further than a tepid version of left reformism. It is, in effect, only a left cover for the trade union bureaucracy.

The Spanish Communist Party (PCE) is in a coalition government that is sending arms to Ukraine as part of NATO's war against Russia. As a result, the PCE has entered a sharp decline. The youth wing (UJCE) rejected the official line and were expelled.

The Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) functions as little more than an election machine for the Democratic Party, calling for a vote for Biden as a 'vote against fascism'.

The South African Communist Party has been part of the pro-capitalist ANC government for 30 years, and even defended the massacre of 34 striking miners at Marikana in 2012.

The list is endless.

The crisis in the Communist Parties

At this critical moment in world history, the international communist movement finds itself in complete disarray.

Communist Parties across the world have responded to the massacre in Gaza with calls to 'respect international law' and the resolutions of the United Nations, that is, the major imperialist powers.

But it was the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 that provoked a deep split, with most Communist Parties scandalously bending to the position of their own ruling class. Many Communist Parties, particularly in the West, covered their tacit support for NATO with pacifist appeals for peace, 'negotiations', etc. The onslaught on Gaza by Israel has made things even worse.

The French Communist Party (PCF), for instance, withdrew from the Left electoral coalition (NUPES) because its leader, Mélenchon, refused to characterise Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

At the other extreme, some parties have become little more than instruments of Russian and Chinese foreign policy, presenting them as progressive allies of the struggle of weak and dependent nations to "break free of imperialist colonisation and debt slavery".

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) is an extreme case. It has lost any claim to an independent existence, let alone a communist one. The party of Zyuganov long ago became just a camp follower of Putin's reactionary regime.

These contradictions have led to a series of splits. An International Meeting of Communist and Worker Parties (IMCWP) in Havana in 2023 failed to even produce a statement on the Ukraine War as it could not find 'consensus'.

The crisis in the communist movement and the role of the KKE

Many rank-and-file communist workers have reacted against this shameless revisionism.

The Greek Communist Party (KKE) has undoubtedly taken important steps in rejecting the old discredited Stalinist-Menshevik idea of two stages. It adopt-

ed a correct internationalist stand on the Ukrainian war, which it characterises as an inter-imperialist conflict.

It led a movement of workers to boycott the shipment of arms from Greek ports to Ukraine. This will be welcomed by all genuine communists. However, while it is clearly of great importance, it is too early to conclude that the progress made by the Greek communists has been completed.

In particular, it is necessary to break completely from the anti-Marxist theory of socialism in one country and to adopt a Leninist united front approach.

The KKE is attempting to build links with other Communist Parties that share its position on the Ukraine war as an inter-imperialist conflict. That is a step in the right direction. However, the prior condition for success is an open and democratic debate involving all genuine communist tendencies in the world.

On the basis of diplomacy and 'consensus' as opposed to debate and democratic centralism, it is impossible to reconstruct a real Communist International based on the ideas and methods of Lenin.

It is our task to return the movement to its genuine origins, to break with cowardly revisionism and embrace the banner of Lenin. To this end, we extend a hand of friendship to any party or organisation that shares this aim.

When Trotsky launched the International Left Opposition, he envisaged it as the left opposition of the international communist movement. We are genuine communists – Bolshevik-Leninists – who were bureaucratically excluded from the ranks of the communist movement by Stalin.

We have always fought to maintain the red banner of October and genuine Leninism, and now we must reclaim our rightful place as an integral part of the world communist movement.

The time has come to open an honest discussion in the movement about the past, which will finally break with the last remnants of Stalinism and prepare the ground for lasting communist unity on the solid foundations of Leninism.

- Down with revisionism!
- For the fighting unity of all communists!
- Back to Lenin!

Lenin's policy

Our immediate task is not to win the masses. That is something entirely beyond our present capabilities. Our aim is to win over the most-advanced and class-conscious elements. Only in this way can we find a road to the masses. But we cannot treat our approach to the masses lightly.

The new generation of workers and youth are looking for a way out of the impasse. The best elements have understood that the only solution lies in taking the road of socialist revolution.

They are beginning to understand the nature of the problems before them and are gradually beginning to grasp the need for radical solutions. But their impatience can lead them to make mistakes.

The work of communists would be very simple if all that was required was to bombard the working class with revolutionary slogans. But that is completely inadequate and can even become counterproductive.

The working class can only learn through experience, especially the experience of great events. Usually it learns only slowly – too slowly for many revolutionaries who sometimes fall under the influence of impatience and frustration.

Lenin understood that, before the Bolsheviks could conquer power, they first had to conquer the masses. For this, great flexibility in tactics is necessary. Lenin always recommended revolutionaries to be patient: "patiently explain" was his advice to the Bolsheviks, even in the heat of the revolution of 1917.

Without a grasp of tactics, setting out from the concrete experience of the working class, all talk of the building of the revolutionary movement is idle chatter: it is like a knife without a blade.

That is why the questions of strategy and tactics must occupy a central place in the considerations of the communists. Both Lenin and Trotsky had a very clear idea about the relationship of the communist vanguard to the mass reformist organisations.

This was summed up in what was undoubtedly Lenin's definitive statement on revolutionary tactics: *Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*. Over a century later, Lenin's writings on this important subject remain a book sealed by seven seals for the pseudo-Trotskyist sectarians.

They have everywhere discredited the banner of Trotskyism and have rendered invaluable services to the bureaucracy. They imagine that the mass organisations can merely be written off as historical anachronisms. Their attitude to these organisations is confined to shrill denunciations of betrayal. But these tactics lead straight into a blind alley.

They have nothing in common with the flexible methods of Lenin and Trotsky, who understood the necessity for communists to build bridges to the mass of workers who remain under the influence of the reformists.

We must turn our backs resolutely on this sterile sectarianism and face boldly towards the working class. By patiently explaining communist policies to the masses and placing demands on the reformist leaders, it is possible to win the reformist workers over to communism.

"All Power to the Soviets"

It is sufficient to mention the fact that, in 1917, Lenin advanced the slogan of "All Power to the Soviets", at a time when these organisations, which represented the mass of workers and soldiers, were under the control of the reformist Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries.

With this slogan, Lenin was saying to the reformist leaders of the Soviets: "Very well, gentlemen. You have the majority. We propose that you take power into your hands and give the people what they want – peace, bread, and land. If you do this, we will support you, civil war will be avoided, and the struggle for power will be reduced to a peaceful struggle for influence inside the Soviets."

The cowardly reformist leaders had no intention of taking power. They subordinated themselves to the bourgeois Provisional Government, which in turn subordinated itself to imperialism and reaction. The workers and soldiers in the Soviets were thus able to see for themselves the treacherous nature of their leaders, and turned towards Bolshevism.

Only by such means was it possible for the Bolsheviks to pass from a small party of approximately 8,000 members in February 1917, to a mass force capable of winning the majority in the Soviets in the period immediately preceding the October Revolution.

Above all, it is necessary for us today to maintain a sense of reality. The genuine forces of communism have been thrown back by historical forces beyond our control. We are reduced to a minority of a minority in the working-class movement.

We have the correct ideas, but the great majority of the working class have yet to be convinced that our ideas are correct and necessary. For the most part, they remain under the influence of the traditional reformist organisations for the simple reason that the leaders of those organisations offer them what seems to be an easy and painless way out of the crisis.

In reality, this road leads only to further defeats, disappointment, and misery. The communists can under no circumstances abandon the working class to the tender mercies of the reformist class traitors and bureaucrats. On the contrary, we must conduct an implacable struggle against them. But there is no way that the working class can avoid passing through the painful school of reformisms.

Our task is not to snipe at them from the sidelines, but to go through the experience with them, side-by-side, helping them to draw the lessons and finding the way forward, as the Bolsheviks did in 1917.

Build a bridge to the workers!

We must establish a dialogue with the working class, in which we are seen, not as alien elements or enemies, but as comrades in struggle against a common enemy – Capital. We must prove to them the superiority of communism, not in words but in deeds.

We must find ways and means to gain an audience among the mass of the workers who remain under the influence of reformism. The bureaucracy will use every unscrupulous method to isolate the communists from the rank-and-file workers. Bans, proscriptions, expulsions, lies, slanders, insults and attacks of all sorts. But the communists will always find ways and means of overcoming these obstacles. There is no way in which the bureaucracy, which has usurped the leadership of the workers' organisations, can prevent the communists from reaching the working class.

There is no golden rule for determining tactics, which are determined by concrete conditions. This is not a principled, but a practical question. Lenin always had a flexible attitude to tactical matters. The same Lenin who stood implacably for a break with Social Democracy in 1914 and supported the establishment of an independent Communist Party in Britain, also proposed the British party apply for affiliation to the Labour Party, while maintaining its own programme, banner and policies.

Under certain circumstances, it may be necessary to send all our forces into the reformist organisations in order to win over the leftward-moving workers to a firm revolutionary position.

At the present stage, however, that is not posed. The conditions for it are absent. But at all times, it is necessary to find a road to the working class. That

is not a tactical question, but a matter of life and death for the communist vanguard.

The communists, even while working as an independent party, are duty-bound to face towards the mass organisations of the working class, pursuing a united front tactic wherever possible, in order to find a road to the masses. This is the ABCs for anyone even remotely acquainted with the ideas and methods of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Our policy is precisely based on Lenin's advice and the theses of the first four congresses of the Communist International. If this is not understood by our sectarian critics, that is entirely their misfortune.

What are we fighting for?

In essence, the aims of the communists are the same as those of the workers in general. We stand for the complete elimination of hunger and of homelessness; for guaranteed work in good conditions; for the drastic reduction of the working week and the conquest of free time; for guaranteed, high-quality healthcare and education; for an end to imperialism and war; and for an end to the insane destruction of our planet.

But we point out that, under conditions of capitalist crisis, these aims can only be achieved through an implacable struggle, and that this can only ultimately be successful when it leads to the expropriation of the bankers and capitalists. It was for this reason that Trotsky developed the idea of transitional demands.

The communists will intervene with the utmost energy in every struggle of the working class. The concrete demands that communists raise in the movement will, of course, change frequently in line with changing conditions, and will vary according to the conditions in each country. Therefore, a programmatic list of demands would be out of place in a manifesto of this nature.

However, the method by which communists in all countries should formulate concrete demands was elaborated brilliantly by Trotsky in 1938 and pub-

lished in the foundational document of the Fourth International, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International* – or the *Transitional Programme* as it is more commonly known.

The demands presented in that document represent a summing up of the programme worked out by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and are contained in the published theses and documents of the first four congresses of the Communist International.

The basic idea of transitional demands can be simply stated. Trotsky explained that in the period of capitalist decline, any serious struggle for improved living standards will inevitably go "beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state".

Just as in warfare, defensive battles can become transformed into offensive ones, so in the class struggle, the fight for immediate demands can lead, under certain circumstances, to a leap in consciousness and a movement in the direction of a revolutionary struggle for power.

In the last analysis, no reform can ever acquire a lasting character unless it is linked to the overthrow of the bourgeois order.

The communists fight for the total emancipation of the working class, for freedom from oppression and agony of toil. This can only be achieved by the destruction of the bourgeois state, the expropriation of the means of production and the introduction of socialist planning under democratic workers' control and management.

Upon this the future of humanity depends. In the words of the great Irish Marxist James Connolly:

"For our demands most moderate are,
We only want the earth."

Is communism a utopian idea?

The last refuge for the defenders of capitalism is to say that there is no alternative to their bankrupt system. But can any reasonable person believe this?

Can it really be true that the human race is incapable of conceiving of a system that is superior to the present horrific situation? Such a fantastic assertion represents a monstrous libel on the intelligence of our species.

The abolition of the dictatorship of the bankers and capitalists will allow the creation of an economy that is rationally planned to satisfy the needs of humanity, not the rapacious greed of a handful of billionaires.

The solution is obvious to any serious thinking person. And it is now within our grasp. That is the only way to abolish hunger, poverty, wars and all the other ills of capitalism, and create a world fit for human beings to live in.

The enemies of communism argue that this is a utopian idea. This accusation has an ironic ring to it. What is utopian is precisely a socio-economic system that has outlived its usefulness, the very existence of which stands in flagrant contradiction to the actual needs of society. Such a system has no right to exist and is condemned to end in the dustbin of history.

There is nothing utopian about communism. On the contrary. The material conditions for a new and higher human society already exist on a world scale and are ripening rapidly.

The enormous advances in science and technology offer a tantalising picture of a world free from poverty, homelessness and hunger. The development of artificial intelligence, combined with modern robotics could serve to reduce the hours of work to the point where, ultimately, people will no longer have to work except out of personal choice.

The abolition of the slavery of labour is precisely the material premise for a classless society. That is now entirely possible. It is not a utopia, but some-

thing that is well within our grasp. A new world is in the process of being born, growing silently but steadily within the womb of the old.

But under capitalism, everything is turned into its opposite. In a system where everything is subordinated to the profit motive, every new technological advance signifies an increase in unemployment together with a lengthening of the working day, and an increase in exploitation and slavery.

All that we propose is to substitute an unjust and irrational system where everything is made subordinate to the insatiable greed of a few, for a rational and harmonious planned economy, based on production for the satisfaction of human needs.

For a genuine Communist International!

Three decades ago, at the time of the fall of the Soviet Union, Francis Fukuyama triumphantly proclaimed the end of history. But history is not so easily disposed of. It continues on its way, regardless of the opinions of bourgeois scribblers. And now the wheel of history has turned 180 degrees.

The fall of the Soviet Union was undoubtedly a great historical drama. But in retrospect, it will be seen as only the prelude to a far greater drama – the terminal crisis of capitalism.

For the reasons outlined above, the present crisis will be prolonged in nature. It can last years, or even decades, with ups and downs, due to the absence of the subjective factor. However, this is only one side of the coin.

The crisis will be long drawn out, but that does not at all mean that it will be peaceful and tranquil. On the contrary! We have entered the most turbulent and disturbed period in the history of modern times.

The crisis will affect one country after another. The working class will have many opportunities to take power. Sharp and abrupt changes are implicit in the whole situation. They can erupt when we least expect them. We must be prepared.

It is no longer necessary to convince broad layers of the youth of the superiority of communism. They are already communists. They are looking for a clean banner, an organisation that has broken radically with reformism and cowardly 'left' opportunism.

We have to take all the practical measures possible to find them and recruit them. This involves the proclamation of a new party and a new International. The entire situation demands it. It is an absolutely necessary and urgent task that admits no delay.

What is required is a genuine Communist Party, which bases itself on the ideas of Lenin and the other great Marxist teachers, and an International on the lines of the Communist International during its first five years.

Our numbers are still small when compared with the great tasks that confront us and we have no illusions on that score. But every revolutionary movement in history has always begun life as a small and seemingly insignificant element.

We have important work to do, and that work is already bearing important fruit and is reaching a decisive stage.

We are growing rapidly because we are now swimming together with the current of history. Above all we have the correct ideas. Lenin said Marxism is all-powerful because it is true. This fact fills us with confidence in the future. The great French utopian socialist Fourier defined socialism as the way to make actual the potential of the human race.

Under communism, for the first time in human history, the doors will be flung open to the masses to really grasp the world of culture which has been denied to them. The road will be open for an undreamed-of blossoming of art, music and culture, such as the world has never seen.

For a new world, in which life will acquire an entirely new meaning. And for the first time, men and women will be able to raise themselves to their true

stature on the basis of complete equality. It will be humankind's leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom.

No longer will men and women have to direct their eyes to the clouds in search of a better life after death. They will experience a new world, in which life itself, purged of oppression, exploitation and injustice, will acquire an entirely new meaning.

That is the wonderful thing for which we are fighting: a paradise in this world.

That is what real communism means.

That is the only cause worth fighting for.

That is why we are communists!

It is incumbent upon every one of us to make sure that this work is carried out immediately, with no hesitation and with the absolute conviction that we will succeed.

Let our fighting slogans be:

- Down with the imperialist robbers!
- Down with capitalist slavery!
- Expropriate the bankers and capitalists!
- Long live Communism!
- Workers of all countries – unite!
- Forward to the building of a new International!

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